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THE MYSTERY OF DETECTIVE FICTION: SOME ANALYTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Phillip Lee

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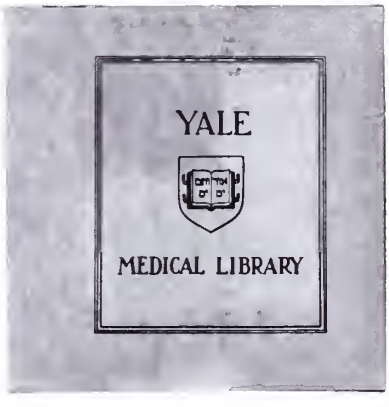
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THE MYSTERY OF DETECTIVE FICTION:

Some Analytic Considerations

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"How can you possibly know so much about the details of other people's lives?"

"Other people's lives are my business."

"And your passion?"

"And my passion. And my obsession, too, I guess."

-- The Far Side of the Dollar.

ABSTRACT

There is a body of psychoanalytic literature concerned with detective fiction. We review that literature critically. Subsequently we consider other dynamic models more consonant with the underlying fantasy content and appeal of the modern detective novel. Certain devices peculiar to the work of the highly acclaimed Ross Macdonald (Kenneth Millar) are considered analytically. Finally the generally accepted notion of the detective as "Oedipal child" is considered.*

* The author wishes to thank Dr. Robert Armstrong for his thoughtful discussion and constructive criticism of many of the issues addressed in this paper.

I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is an extensive body of analytic writing concerning the detective story. In examining this work some common themes emerge, while many contradictory views are seen to be held by the various writers on this subject. Some of the discrepancies are no doubt explained by the changes which have taken place in the format since Poe wrote what are generally considered to be the first detective stories in the 1840's. The format, then and now, features a crime or crimes committed by a person or persons unknown. The story continues to relate the efforts of a central character to discover the identity of the perpetrator and the mechanism and motive for the criminal acts. That a fixed format should have a dynamic usefulness is clear. "We can grasp the significance of fixed genres, with their coded assurance that psychic activity will be patterned and resolved along familiar lines.[1]" At the same time within a given format over a period of more than a century it is not surprising that there should be change. ". . . Art that strives for originality is always restless within its formal borders and frequently generates new forms . . .[2]"

This paper is chiefly concerned with the latest evolution of the detective genre: the California mystery stories of Ross McDonald, a man called by the New York Times "the greatest living detective writer in English . . . and perhaps our greatest living novelist.[3]" But in attempting to understand to what extent Mr. McDonald (and to a lesser degree the other California detective novelists, Raymond

Chandler and Dashiell Hammett) are the current standard bearers of a hundred year history of crime writing, and to what extent they depart from that tradition, it is not inappropriate view then in the context of their predecessors. In doing so it may be possible to isolate analytically specific elements which make the mystery unique, and further it may be possible to tease out those dynamic components which distinguish MacDonald's novels and the other "California" detective novels from those which preceded them.

In considering the role of detective stories in a child analysis[4], Edith Buxbaum finds herself in agreement with Hans Zulliger[5] who found that boys read detective stories to ward off anxiety[6]. She finds that the detective who is "invincible, generous, farseeing and clever[7]" is chosen as an ego-ideal by the reader. However, the reader also "identified himself with the victim or victim-to-be of the detective stories.[8]" The reader also turns out to identify with the murderer. And this murderer might turn out to be anyone. "Every person in the story, even the detective himself, might be the murderer, and was under suspicion.[9]" However, she did further hold that the detective served to ward off instinctual desires, while the victim and the murderer "were in the service of wish fulfillment.[9]" Her final conclusion is that detective stories are a defense against fear.

While it is no doubt true that boys read detective stories to ward off anxiety, this cannot be said to be true of detective stories in particular. Countless activities serve this function. It would be more helpful had the author chosen to elaborate more completely what in particular about detective stories and only

detective stories is of use to the reader of that genre in warding off anxiety.

But on the other hand, though subsequent analytic interpreters of the mystery have not made much use of or reference to Buxbaum's work, she does touch on several points which are relevant to the genre. Her thesis, had she expanded it, would have served to explain the dynamics of the earliest detective stories. Consider Edgar Allen Poe's classic myster, The Murders in the Rue Morgue. A series of baffling murders takes place in the city of Paris. Certain obstacles such as locked doors and inaccessible windows render the murders singularly mysterious. The detective, however, is the embodiment of ratiocination; and, by the exercise of what the reader is led to believe is reason of the highest order, he is able to solve the case. He demonstrates that the murders were performed by an orang-utan who had escaped from a circus.

Now one might not expect this tale to be of much interest to the reader. How much interest do people have in finding out that a man by the exercise of the highest powers of reason can outsmart an orang-utan? However, this tale fascinated audiences for over a hundred years. The reason for that lies in its subconscious significance. The orang-utan may be said to represent the untrammelled id aggressive instincts, the animal in man. That these unleashed instincts should wreak such mysterious havoc is not surprising since their presence is not evident in ordinary human beings. Poe has represented a fact of psychological life later elaborated by Freud, that man disavows what is most hateful in himself. The

denoument is satisfying to the reader because it satisfies psychological truth; it is the part of reason of the ego as represented in the story by the ratiocinative detective, to curb the unbridled id. From the dynamic point of view the modern counterpart to this type of story is Jaws; and it is this type of story of which it is correct to say with Buxbaum that "the detective serves to ward off instinctual desires" (after those desires have been gratified). In those stories where there is a central random malevolent agent which is subsequently controlled by another agent, it is perhaps further true as Buxbaum points out that the reader does indeed identify with the murderer (id), with the detective (ego) and with the victim. The identification with the victim stems from the child's fantasy that his agressive and hostile (id) wishes aimed at the father or mother will be perpetrated upon him.

Leopold Bellak M.A., M.D. writing "On the Psychology of Detective Stories and Related Problems[10]" finds himself for the most part in agreement with Buxbaum. He declares that detective stories are "the most popular literary form of our day[11]" and sets out to explain their dynamics. He feels that these consist of the reader being "permitted to identify with the criminal[12]" which can be done safely because "the Super-Ego is satisfied that detection and punishment will follow[13]". After having identified with the criminal, the reader is then permitted to identify with the detective. The detective is a "super-man." He knows all the answers, at times by means of unusual powers.[14]" He is of high social class, and the reader feels himself lifted up. Identification with the sleuth is pleasurable because he has the wish-fulfilling characteristics

of a superman. Dr. Bellak belatedly notes that Poirot and others do not have the characteristics of a superman but rather "are outwardly very unassuming." This does not interfere with the author's thesis, however, because "this allows the reader to identify once more: 'I am unassuming. If people only knew how wonderful I am under all this everyday appearance.[15]"

Bellak explains the delight found in detective stories as a "libidinization of anxiety . . . people like to play with anxiety as long as the dangerous situation is selected by themselves . . . unpleasure may be felt as pleasure if the situation can be controlled.[16]" For Bellak, the "structural dynamics" of the detective story are summed up in this formula: "tension and anxiety are more or less skillfully increased and then suddenly reduced . . . The cognitive aspect of the satisfaction with the solution is best expressed in terms of Gestalt psychology, namely, that closure is experienced[17]." (italics are Bellak's)

Bellak goes on to argue that the above dynamic description applies to gambling as well, that gambling is indulged in by those with little frustration tolerance, that low frustration tolerance is a sign of impaired Ego strength, that impaired Ego strength is found in those prone to addictions; hence the addiction to the reading of mysteries.[18]

Clearly Bellak's suggestions are in many cases open to the same objections as those of Buxbaum; what he says may be true but not true of the mystery story in particular. The libidinization of anxiety and the satisfaction with closure are found in all artistic experiences, most sporting experiences, and in many

interpersonal and work related areas. That the reader enjoys identifying with the superman type of detective is perhaps true, but as true in romantic and classic literature as in the detective novels alluded to. The additional argument that when the detective is not such an attractive character the reader enjoys identifying with him also for precisely the reason that he appears unattractive is ingenious but perhaps somewhat specious. M. Poirot, the cerebral Belgian detective created by the late Agatha Christie, is the modern detective counterpart of M. Dupin, the detective of Edgar Allen Poe. Poirot, by force of reason alone, triumphs over evil. Evil is quite clearly the greed or malevolence of the id, as projected onto one particular character. The dynamic mechanism of these particular novels is precisely that already discussed in Poe. The detective, erroneously described as unassuming by Bellak, does in fact represent a denial of agressive and sexual instincts, with heightened sublimations represented by his vast knowledge and ratiocinative power. Poirot is perhaps more smug than unassuming, but this indirect aggression is in character in one who is denied the ordinary aggressive outlets. It is perhaps more correct to say that Poirot will appeal as an ego ideal to those (obsessive) personalities who value intellectualization as a way of warding off threats of their own projected agressive drives than to say that Poirot appeals to unassuming people because he is himself unassuming.

Bellak's unsupported proposition that reading detective fiction is like gambling may be at most superficially true. Gambling and its psychological components have been well discussed (see Imago, 1947,

vol. 4) without any clear relationship to the reading of detective literature being either adduced or demonstrated. The supposition on which the relationship was based by Bellak, that reading detective fiction is a sign of low frustration tolerance, may be relatively but is probably not absolutely true. People read mystery stories at times when other forms of entertainment are available which would cater to at least an equally low frustration tolerance. Television, sports, conversation, sightseeing, thumbing through a magazine are all alternative indulgences which are regularly passed up by readers of mysteries. To state that the mystery attracts those with a low frustration tolerance could not, even if true, define the appeal of the mystery in particular.

Unlike Bellak and Buxbaum one analytic writer has advanced a specific explanation for the peculiar appeal of the detective story. Geraldine Pederson-Krag, M.D., in her paper Detective Stories and the Primal Scene[19] notes that detective fiction accounts for a quarter of all fiction published in the United States, one third to one half of the dramatic programs, and a large percentage of the moving pictures. Pederson-Krag asserts that the unique feature of the mystery is not the relief of anxiety nor the identification with various characters but rather "the intense curiosity it arouses." She points out that the human capacity for curiosity reaches "its first and most intense expression[20]" in the actual observation of the primal scene. She quotes Fenichel, not on the subject of curiosity and the primal scene, but rather to the effect that the observation of sexual scenes between adults "creates a high degree of sexual excitement . . . This impression is caused by the fact that the quantity of excitement is

beyond the child's capacity to discharge and is therefore experienced as traumatically painful[21]."

Pederson-Krag then proceeds to discuss at some length the famous cases of Little Hans and the Wolf-man. She makes the point that witnessing the primal scene was traumatic for these patients, and notes that the repressed memory is charged with painful affect. She concludes that the mystery attempts to present "a more satisfying, less painful primal scene from the standpoint of the unconscious[22]." The painful nature of the original primal scene is illustrated by a hebephrenic patient of Fenichel's who "as a child had frequently witnessed primal scenes[23]," and also by a woman patient who until the age of five showed a "precocious interest in other people's private lives and mental processes. Then a small boy told her a kindergarten classic about sexual organs and their functioning. This story served to reactivate for her repressed memories of the primal scene, and she became frightened of the curiosity she had previously tolerated well. She shrank from recognizing anything that would suggest that one person differs from another in any way[24]."

Furthermore, Pederson-Krag explains the compulsion to read mysteries as analogous to the Wolf-man's voyeuristic interest in the primal scene. "The fictional primal scene satisfies the voyeurs who, like the Wolf-man, gazed with strained attention at the scene of parental coitus. The voyeur is never entirely satisfied with his peeping which he has the compulsion endlessly to repeat like the detective story addict who rereads the same basic mystery tale without tedium[25]."

Despite the power and persuasiveness of this argument which has

shaped analytic thinking about the mystery for a generation, there are some problems with it that should be examined. The first is that Pederson-Krag postulates that the appeal of the detective novel is to those readers who have actually witnessed the primal scene. Keeping in mind that Pederson-Krag herself stated that one quarter of the novels and one third to one half of the dramatic presentations were mysteries, she is postulating a large number of witnesses to the primal scene.

This is not the first time in the history of psychoanalysis that a symptom formation (in this case the reading of mysteries) has on the basis of analytic evidence been attributed to a particular childhood trauma which it later turned out could not have occurred in all of the large population which exhibit the symptom. One is reminded in particular of the theory which Freud announced in 1893 and held until 1897, namely that the essential cause of hysteria was a childhood seduction.

> From May 1893, when he made the first announcement of it to Fliess, to September 1897, when he admitted his error, he (Freud) held the opinion that the essential cause of hysteria was a sexual seduction of an innocent child on the part of some adult, most often the father; the evidence of the analytical material appeared irrefragable. For more than four years he maintained this conviction, though being increasingly surprised at the frequency of the supposed occurrence. It began to look as if a large proportion of fathers carried out these incestuous assaults . . . He inferred, from the existence of some hysterical symptoms in his brothers and several sisters . . . that even his own father had to be thus incriminated . . . towards the end of this period doubts began to crowd his mind . . .[26] (underlining mine)

This is a particularly relevant passage because the fallacy in Freud's thinking is the same as in the thinking of Pederson-Krag. Freud eventually discovered that the child was not the passive victim of the trauma of a seduction; rather the parents were innocent but

the fantasy wishes of the child had led to a fantasy seduction. And likewise it may become clear in the next section of this paper that the reader of the mystery is not the passive spectator of a primal scene, but rather is personally guilty of a fantasy act in childhood.

The methodology of Pederson-Krag is also open to question. Her contention that readers of mysteries are people who have witnessed the primal scene might be validated by showing a correlation between those who have witnessed such a scene and those who read this type of fiction. Not only does Pederson-Krag not make such a general correlation, but she also does not make even a particular correlation between the specific cases which she mentions and a proclivity for detective fiction. Little Hans, the Wolf-man, Fenichel's hebephrenic patient, the five year old girl --- do even they read detective fiction? No mention is made of such an interest even among this limited and personally selected population of patients who have been witnesses to a primal scene.

Another problem with the primal scene theory is evident in Pederson-Krag's delicate handling of the question of what, if any, are the reader's identifications with the characters in the detective novel. The problem for her is to explain how it is that the reader, reminded of this repressed material, is not then threatened by it. After all, one of her own examples was of a woman patient who until the age of five, showed "precocious interest in other people's private lives and mental processes" but who was then told a "kindergarten classic" story. "This story served to reactivate for her repressed memories of the primal scene, and she became frightened of the curiosity she had previously tolerated well . . . shrank from recognizing anything . . . [27]" Pederson-Krag first overcomes this

problem by saying ". . . Finally the crime is reconstructed, the mystery solved, that is, the primal scene is exposed. The reader has no need to take part in this by directly identifying with the characters because the gratification is obtained from being a passive onlooker[28]."

It is all very well to have the reader be a passive onlooker, and perhaps therefore unthreatened by highly charged material. However, it is not clear that a "passive onlooker" would bother to read a detective novel; and other analytic writers have corroborated what is no doubt intuitively obvious, that the reader does at least identify with the detective to some extent. Indeed, when discussing the question of the reader's participation in the detective story Pederson-Krag also finds that "the ego, personified by the great detective, can look, remember and correlate without fear and without reproach in utter contrast to the ego of the terrified infant witnessing the primal scene[29]."

There is perhaps a good deal of truth in this most recent position taken by Pederson-Krag, but it is not her last word on the matter. She proceeds to explain the "peculiarities with which many writers endow their detectives" in a way which contradicts what Bellak had to say on this subject* while reverting to her first position of non-identification with the detective. "The peculiarities with which many writers endow their detectives allow the reader, who is a little frightened by what he is doing, to say 'This is not I;

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* i.e. Poirot and others are unassuming in order to allow the reader to identify by saying "I am unassuming. If people only knew how wonderful I am under all this everyday appearance!" footnote 13.

don't blame me[30]."Pederson-Krag's reader shuttles between identification with and disavowal of the detective depending upon whether the trauma or the reworking of the primal scene is uppermost in her mind.

Finally, she explains the dynamic role of Dr. Watson as a special case of disavowal of the detective.

> Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes' plodding companion, is more important than a literary device. He supplies the reader with a safe defense, for should the punishing superego threaten, the reader can point to this character and say, "This is I. I was simply standing by."[31]

This is an interesting interpretation of the dynamic role of Dr. Watson and deserves consideration; and, indeed, no discussion of the detective novel can be complete without some mention of the famous creations of the London ophthalmologist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The special role of Dr. Watson can perhaps be approached through an examination of some perceptive comments made about him by Maxine de Chastaing writing in the Journal de Psychologie Normale et Pathologique on the subject of Roman Policier et Psychologie de la Verite[32] (The Detective Novel and the Psychology of Truth). While most of what de Chastaing has to say deals in a philosophical manner with the nature of truth, she does in passing elucidate several important characteristics of Dr. Watson. Important remarks she makes relating to Dr. Watson are: (translation by the author)

> Sans cesse, Watson admet l'existence de forces inconnues . . . (Watson is an unfailing believer in the uncanny) [33]

> Watson est capable d'etre, si l'on ose dire, aussi primitif qu'un primitif. N'est-il pas pret a violer le principe de contradiction lorsqu'il croit qu'un individu a mysterieusement pu tuer un promeneur dans la rue sans quitter sa chambre? Ecrivons meme, de facon generale, qu'en tout individu existe un primitif. (Watson is capable, if one dares to say it, of being as primitive

> as a primitive. Is he not ready to violate the principle of contradiction as soon as he is willing to believe that someone has been mysteriously able to shoot a pedestrian in the street, all the while without leaving his room? We do say, in a general manner of speaking, that in every individual there exists a primitive . . .[34]

Now what portion of the mind do we think of as able to contain contradictions, of using magical thinking, as harboring the primitive urges? Does not everything Maxine de Castaing says about Watson suggest that he represents the id in the dynamics of the Sherlock Holmes stories? But closer examination of Watson shows he represents in fact a portion of id functions, with aggression split off and attributed to the villain. Holmes in contrast represents, like his predecessor Dupin, the triumph of reason. However, Holmes is in several ways a more sophisticated version of Dupin. He has more drive outlets, more sublimations, and is in fact tiresomely adept at everything including acting, music, boxing, chemistry et. al. The vengeful superego is split off onto the evil genius Moriarty. The good superego, the friendly object, resides also within Holmes himself, however, and his famous "Elementary, my dear Watson" is the quintessential beneficent paternalistic remark. For the reader Holmes is both an ego ideal and a friendly superego figure, while Watson is the longed for minor sibling with whom there is no rivalry because we are always one up on him. Holmes is not married not because as Bauer, Balter, and Hunt[35] have suggested he is the Oedipal child and therefore cannot be the head of a family but rather because in our relationship as readers with him we are sometimes the child. As the child we feel in reading

these stories that he is always there with us, and the presence of a family to claim the attention of the detective would arouse our own Oedipal anxieties in this format.*

The Holmes-Moriarty-Watson dynamic has a strong appeal to readers of detective fiction, and has even persisted into our day with some slight dynamic alterations in the Rex Stout novels in which Nero Wolfe is the powerful ego figure (his character "fleshed out" by the addition of oral cannibalistic urges; rapacity, particularly in the early novels, and appetite in all the novels), Archie Goodwin is the "good" id (with more ego structure than his counterpart, Dr. Watson), and Arnold Zeck is the punishing superego (in some of the novels his role is taken by other agencies, notably in The Doorbell Rang by the FBI).

While from the preceding study of Dr. Watson then and now it may not seem necessary to accept Pederson-Krag's interpretation of his dynamic significance ("Should the punishing superego threaten the reader can point to this character -- Watson -- and say 'This is I. I was simply standing by.'") it is perhaps nonethelss appropriate at this point to sum up the positive contributions of Pederson-Krag to the study of detective fiction. She offered a specific mechanism to account for the unique appeal of the detective genre. In linking this appeal to a specific event in the life of each and every reader she may have put herself in a position of having

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* There are detective novels in which the detective is married, of course. Donald Westlake's novels under the pen name Tucker Coe and Flynn by Gregory McDonald are recent examples. In these novels the reader does not simply accept the detective as ego ideal or superego figure. The Oedipal anxiety for the reader is avoided at the expense of the close relationship between detective and reader; the dynamics which are more complex than in the mainstream detective genre are beyond the scope of this paper.

to interpret the evidence rather broadly and sometimes in an almost contradictory manner to support her thesis. But the value of a psychoanalytic theory is not necessarily summed up in the weight of the evidence which can be marshalled for it. "The real value of literary psychoanalysis is that it can embolden us to be alone with books, to recognize our own image in them, and from that recognition to begin comprehending their hold over us[36]."

Before leaving Pederson-Krag it should be noted that one other analytic writer has taken exception to the primal scene theory (which is nonetheless still the most commonly accepted dynamic explanation of the detective novel). Charles Rycroft[37] has objected to it on grounds different from those presented in this paper. He finds that Pederson-Krag does not attempt the analysis of a particular detective story to show that it contains a disguised representation of a primal scene, and that she does not demonstrate that the readers of detective fiction exhibit the character traits such as anxiety-ridden curiosity or pathological jealousy which one would expect to find in witnesses to a primal scene. He too is sceptical of the necessity to have actually witnessed a primal scene but does not explain why saying only "this difference in formulation stems from theoretical considerations which are remote from the specific theme of this paper[38]."

The best of the modern California detective story can be thought of as beginning with Dashiell Hammett, continuing with Raymond Chandler, and currently featuring Ross MacDonald. While there are ways in which these writers are different from one another, yet as a group they provide a body of work which is distinctive. Because those qualities which render their work distinctive are most exaggerated in Ross MacDonald, and because he has received so much current critical and popular acclaim, many of the examples we will use will be drawn from his work.

First we propose to look analytically at some of the distinctive characteristics of the California detective novel. These stories have distinctive characteristics which include

1) the main character: aging, divorced, conflicted, guilt-ridden and obsessed with his case
2) the style of the detective's movement through the novel towards knowledge, which is a function neither of finger-prints, ballistics tests, statistics or anything of a scientific nature, nor of Holmesian super deduction. It is instead largely the product of the use of language in interview situations with other characters.
3) humor: there is a particular kind of humor, confined to the main character, which is central to these novels.
4) the span of these novels through time: although the action is seen through the eyes of the narrator-detective and occupies only a few days, yet the cases always turn out to involve a disappearance or mysterious circumstance

dating back a generation. (MacDonald particularly)

6) the dynamic meaning of California itself in these novels. (MacDonald particularly)

The detective is one who seeks to find out what others are trying to keep hidden from him. This sounds so much like a metaphor for the child's early sexual curiosity that Pederson-Krag was led to postulate that every reader of detective fiction was mastering the trauma of an original primal scene. We see no need to postulate an actual primal scene (see page 9 of this paper). However, it is generally acknowledged that the child's first instinct for knowledge is allied with a sexual curiosity, i.e. where and how the child is born and who else comes from there. Melanie Klein, based on analyses of small children, states that there is a universal childhood fantasy: "The first object of this instinct for knowledge is the interior of the mother's body . . . (the child) wants to know what is going on and what things look like in there[39]." In this paper we are for greater convenience going to take what Klein says literally. This is partly because in Ross MacDonald's novels the language leads us to believe that one fantasy MacDonald offers his readers is surprisingly similar to the fantasy elaborated by Klein. Certainly it is commonly held that a characteristic wish of the second half of the oral phase is the "desire to incorporate into oneself both the wished-for and the feared contents of the mother's body[40]." Archer's own words when read analytically provide a clue about what fantasy he-and through him the reader-are having.

"Aren't you married?" She was a quick woman.
"I was, about twenty-five years ago."
"Is your wife still alive?"
"I hope so."
"Haven't you tried to find out?"
"Not recently. I prefer to find out about other people's lives." 41

We were all married a long time ago, to our mothers. In any case, as Freud has pointed out,[42] the wife is a mother surrogate. This may be as clear a statement as is needed about the sublimated desire for more knowledge about the mother refunnelled into the exploration of other people's lives.

A further consideration of these remarks in context will help to confirm this interpretation.

"Actually I haven't seen him or talked to him for over thirty years. But I've got a very strong feeling that he's alive."
She touched her breast, as if at least he was alive there. Droplets of sweat grew on her upper lip.
She brushed them away with her hand.
"I'm afraid this is getting me down a little. All of a sudden the past rears up and smacks you. Just when I thought I finally had it under control. Does that ever happen to you?"
"Not so much in the daytime. At night, just before I go to sleep ---"
"Aren't you married?" She was a quick woman.
"I was, about twenty-five years ago."
"Is your wife still alive?"
"I hope so."
"Haven't you tried to find out?"
"Not recently. I prefer to find out about other people's lives."

An attractive older woman touches her breast and Archer tells us about his interest in finding out about other people's lives. His remarks, immediately following mention of the distant past one had thought one had under control as situated within the body of an attractive older woman, may be somewhat confirmatory. The underlying fantasy suggested

is one of finding out about the inside of the attractive older woman (mother).

Klein asserts that the interior of the mother's body is regarded by the child as an object of oral gratification. "At the same time as it wants to force its way into its mother's body in order to take possession of the contents and to destroy them, it wants to know what is going on in there . . . and the one desire reinforces and stands for the other. Thus the instinct for knowledge becomes linked at its source with sadism when it is at its height, which makes it easier to understand why that bond should be so close, and why the instinct for knowledge should arouse such feelings of guilt in the individual[43]."

Non-analytic critics have noted the devaluation of the question of who done it in the modern "who-dunnit." Writing in the New York Times about Ross MacDonald's The Blue Hammer Michael Wood noted that "His actual solutions are a good deal less exciting than that first hint, and are often subtle versions of defeat, sad, short-winded achievements of the isolated intellect[44]." Raymond Chandler himself, the literary precursor of Ross MacDonald, has said that 'the ideal mystery is one you would read if the end was missing.'

How can it be true that the ending of a detective novel is not its paramount interest? That can be the case only if the search for truth by the detective-cum-reader, the process by which he passes from the beginning of the novel towards its conclusion, has as great a dynamic significance for the reader as does the ending. And that is precisely the case in the modern mystery. The dramatic tension is generated by the search for knowledge with the fantasy of parental

retribution externalized, that is to say projected onto the other characters. The detective and the reader share a common desire to achieve knowledge (i.e. a common fantasy of incorporating the contents of the mother's body), and because the instinct for knowledge is at its source tinged with sadism and because they are not themselves sadistic, they share a common guilt. Archer's feelings of guilt are made clear in the novels:

> "I'd have a better idea if you'd cooperate fully. I'm trying to head off trouble for you and your son."
> "You smell like trouble to me," he said.
> That stopped me for a minute. He had a salesman's insight into human weakness, and he'd touched on a fact which I didn't always admit to myself . . . 45

> I told her the truth . . . which was a refreshing change from my usual approach 46

> "I can smell the dirt on you from other people's dirty secrets."
> I produced what felt from the inside like a lopsided smile. The girl was young and foolish . . . but I hated to smell dirty to her 47

This feeling of guilt on Archer's part is a distinctive feature of the Ross MacDonald novel, important to the reader's identification with the detective. This paper accepts the contention of previous writers that the detective is overtly an ego ideal to the reader, and that his boldness, skill, and cunning do serve to ward off anxiety just as those attributes have been found to perform this selfsame function in children's play.[48] But it is our contention that the reader of Ross MacDonald has too strong an ego function of his own to identify himself completely with a James Bond or even a Sherlock Holmes. Certain blemishes are necessary in the make-up of the detective in order that the reader find the fantasy merger in which he is

indulging on the deepest level neither too ludicrous and far-fetched, nor too threatening or engulfing. Guilt is particularly appropriate if, as we are postulating, the reader, through the detective, is indulging in a fantasy in which a disguised sexual curiosity is gratified. Whatever preconscious anxiety or guilt the reader feels in sharing the detective's search increases the strength of identification the reader feels with the overtly conflicted detective.

Hate as well as reparation can be expressed overtly by Archer;

> I thought of hitting him. He was big enough to make it worthwhile. 49

This helps the reader identify with Archer. We surmise that if this anger were to get out of control then the reader's anxiety would become manifest and his pleasure in the novel would end. Archer's thinly disguised reparative urges reassure the reader; the reader who is Archer in fantasy is reassured about his own reparative urges.

> It was depressing not to be able to hit him again because he was younger and softer and too easy. 50

> "I was a sucker for the underdogs" 51

Reparative urges bar an attack on smaller people as Archer and the reader exhibit at the smae time a controlled urge to punish their own parent and an urge to be the good parent they never had. This is important in terms of the end of the fantasy when, having achieved mastery, the detective acts justly but not vindictively. The detective is never angry at the guilty party in the end; he is himself guilty. In the endings the main character exhibits as much mercy or reparation as possible. The ending of the recent movie version of Chandlers' The Long Goodbye is jarring and disturbing, and indeed, though the

novel is a perennial favorite the film was relatively unsuccessful. This may be due to the difference in endings. In the original novel the detective shows compassion for the one-time friend who has disappointed him. In the movie the detective shoots the one-time friend. The triumph of sadistic over reparative urges increases the anxiety of the audience.

That this difference is important is apparent if one accepts the findings of Melanie Klein on the subject of what allows children indulging in make-believe play to continue playing, and what interrupts their play.

> . . . the ego can never fully achieve the aim of mastering anxiety by means of play. As long as anxiety remains latently operative, it makes itself felt as a constant incentive to play, but as soon as it becomes manifest it interrupts their game. 52

If one substitutes read for play in the preceding paragraph, one has a possible explanation for the mystery addict. The ego can never fully achieve the aim of mastering anxiety by means of reading. As long as anxiety remains latently operative, it makes itself felt as a constant incentive to read, but as soon as it becomes manifest it interrupts the book. We are postulating that a sadistic rather than a guilty detective would make the anxieties of the reader of Ross MacDonald more manifest and interrupt his reading (fantasy, game).*

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* The converse might well be true for the reader of Mickey Spillane.

HUMOR IN ROSS MACDONALD:

Note that while there is much humor in Ross MacDonald, indeed in all the California mysteries, this humor is nonetheless confined almost exclusively to the main character "cracking wise," or to the narrative which we take as experience ironically refracted through the consciousness of the detective.

The presence of this humor and its confinement entirely to the main character have dynamic significance. Note first that when the humor in a detective format is not confined to the main character (Donald Westlake for example) then a different effect from the one we have been describing is achieved. The effect is that of parody, and although the form of the detective story may persist, the dynamics are no longer operative. In those novels of a detective format in which no one jokes including the detective (Mickey Spillane, Andrew York) a different effect is also achieved: sadism.

This is because the humor has a significant dynamic as well as structural function. Humor displaces the reader's concern from the underlying fantasy content to the verbal level. Thus the use of humor is not only a stylistic device but also a defense provided for the reader, reducing his emotional response to and aiding his management of the underlying fantasy material.[53]

> He said Mr. Lemberg was probably at work.
> "Where does he work?"
> "He's supposed to be a car salesman."
> "Supposed to be?"
> "I don't think he's doing so good. He's just on commission with a secondhand dealer. The reason I know, he tried to sell me a car." He snickered, as if he possessed the secret of a more advanced type of transportation. 54

In this complex transaction the reverse of an anal fantasy of being forced is presented (He can't make me take in a possession), and the defense in turn parodied by Archer.

> But her figure was very good, lush-breasted and narrow-waisted. I wondered if it was for sale or simply on display by the owner." 55

The witty use of a language commonly associated with houses or works of art to describe the woman's body (for sale, or display by owner) displaces or distances the primarily oral threat of engulfment represented by the woman.

> In the road above, another car shrieked to a halt. Two sheriff's men got out on opposite sides and came down the bank in a double cloud of dust . . .
> "This your car?" the first one snapped at me.
> "No."
> I started to tell him what had happened to mine, but he didn't want to hear about it.
> "Out of there!" Keep your hands in sight, shoulder-high."
> I got out, feeling that all this had happened before. . . the second deputy shook me down. He was very thorough. He even investigated the fuzz in my pockets. I commented on this.
> "This is no joke. What's your name?"
> . . . I was angry and sweating. I opened my mouth, and put both feet in, all the way up to the knee.
> "I'm Captain Nemo," I said. "I just came ashore from a hostile submarine. Curiously enough, we fuel our subs with seaweed. The hull itself is formed from highly compressed seaweed. So take me to your wisest man. There is no time to be lost." 56

The deputies try to take from Archer what he does not have to give them. There is an anal fantasy of defiance and submission operating here, with Archer withholding all but the lint in his pockets. There is also an oral fantasy of losing the boundaries of the self as the deputy shakes Archer down, ("invading his space" in California talk)

while Archer stands defenseless. There is an undertone of the helpless infant, arms also at shoulder height, held by the all powerful parenting figure.

Archer, mocking the police with his nonsense, provides an oral defense against taking in by instead expelling from his mouth words that "bite[57]." Archer's remarks get him (and through him the reader) into trouble, of course, as the police proceed to arrest him. But this external conscious threat is easily dealth with. His words ward off the more frightening threat of a fantasied oral merger. Archer opens his mouth and "puts both feet in all the way up to the knee," that is to say he gets himself into trouble, but at the same time uses his remarks to block fantasy routes to oral satisfaction.

His words are interesting also. He has "just come ashore from a hostile submarine." There is an image of ejaculation here. Archer is picturing himself as a new born child, confronted with influences that thwart him. No wonder he has the "feeling that all this has happened before." He demands to be "taken" to "your wisest man." Archer wants to put his plight before the powerful parent figure. Indeed, the detectives take him directly to Sheriff Trask. On the following page:

> The Sheriff turned to Sable. "This your man?"
> "Of course."
> Conger (the second deputy) was already removing the handcuffs, unobtrusively, as if perhaps I wouldn't notice they'd ever been on my wrists. The back of Barney's neck reddened. He didn't turn around, even when I stepped out of the car.
> The Sheriff gave me his hand. He had a calm and weathered face in which quick bright eyes moved with restless energy. "I'm Trask. I won't apologize. We all make mistakes. Some of us more than others, eh, Conger?" 57

On the fantasy level, defiance is ultimately condoned by the new parenting figure, while those who initially attempted to thwart the central character are reduced to the role of humiliated siblings.

Humor may have a third function in addition to the two main ones of displacing the reader's concern from the underlying fantasy content to the verbal level and of providing a defense against oral wishes. This third function of humor, while more tenuous than the first two, could help explain why humor in California mysteries is confined to the main character or to narrative which is perceived as experience through the eyes of the narrator. Humor which is confined to the detective isolates the detective as a character with a superego trying to console the ego. It is the superego according to Freud which "tries, by means of humor, to console the ego and protect it from suffering . . ."[59].

"When their superego becomes less harsh children develop a sense of humor . . . they become so detached from their sadistic impulses which once governed them . . . that they sometimes make fun of them. I have heard quite small children joke, for instance, about the idea that they once really wanted to eat their Mummy up or cut her into pieces. The decrease of the sense of guilt which accompanies these changes also enables sadistic desires which were before entirely repressed to undergo sublimation[60]."

This is of course exactly the dynamic as well as structural significance of the detective as a character who is able to exercise the search for knowledge as a sublimation of the desire to enter his mother's body without the curtailment of his ability to learn. The reader's anxiety is lessened as the sadistic component of that desire

for knowledge is vitiated by reparative urges or made over into guilt.

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT:

The method of Archer's search for knowledge deserves some mention. Almost always in a MacDonald mystery there is a character who disappeared a generation ago. But this character is alive in the memories and in fact seems to wield influence in the lives of the survivors. Tony Galton disappeared twenty five years before the opening of the novel but Archer finds that "the whole household seemed to revolve around the missing man, as if he'd left only the day before[61]." In The Blue Hammer, "Actually I haven't seen him or talked to him for over thirty years. But I've got a very strong feeling that he's still alive. She touched her breast, as if at least he was alive there[62]." The disappeared characters in these novels are introjects to the survivors with whom the novels open. As introjects are always currently "alive" in the mind, we are always unsurprised to find these introjects are in fact "alive" in the novel. Or if we are surprised it nonetheless seems fitting that they should be so as this matches our own subjective psychological experience.

In The Blue Hammer the character who has disappeared is the vibrant and powerful painter, Richard Chantry. Richard Chantry is introduced to the reader under another name as early as page seventeen as "a heavy old man . . . dirty gray hair and a short growth of moth eaten gray beard." The reader is unable to recognize Richard Chantry because he has heard described not the man but the introject. And while the man and the introject are both still alive, they have

diverged to the point where they have nothing in common. The characters in these novels lose touch with reality because they stay in touch with their introjects rather than perceiving the here and now through ego function. Only the reader-cum-detective, who enters the scene after all the introjects are in, is able to perceive things as they are. His job, which comprises the mainspring of the structural action in these novels, is an analytic one: to discover the internal view of the characters, to present reality to them in a manner that facilitates the release of other information in their possession, and then himself to see and allow other characters to see the real world. Careful interviewing is necessary in order to arrive at the truth because all the characters besides the detective employ a high degree of splitting, displaced affect, and projection, in addition to the aforementioned attachment to unreal images.

THE INTERVIEW STYLE OF THE DETECTIVE:

The technique of the detective is straightforward; generally he demands an elaboration of whatever apparently complete answer he has been given.

> "We agreed to disagree, you know what I mean."
> "Not exactly." 63

> "I could tell them a thing or two!"
> "Like what?" 64

> "My husband -- he doesn't know."
> "What doesn't he know?" 65

It is easy for the reader to identify with this search for knowledge, to feel that he could have, or in fact that he "is" asking these

questions. This is in contradistinction to Holmes' extravagant conclusions, which today's reader finds more the product of mysticism than of ego function.

In dealing with projection, the detective asks more clearly for further information in order that the reader may identify at least preconsciously the defense:

> "There seemed to be some kind of secret about the man -- something sinister."
> "Is that a fact, or only your impression?"
> "My impression. I suppose I've been too open to impressions lately." 65

Displaced affect is commonplace for almost every character except Archer.

> Deep feeling sounded in her voice. I had no doubt that the feeling was partly sincere. Still, there was something unreal about it. I suspected she had been playing tricks with her emotions for a long time, until none of them was quite valid. 67

> Anger had begun to whine in the undertones of her voice. 68

> Sable's voice throbbed with emotion, but I doubted it was related to any deep feeling he had for the Galton Family. 69

The clear narrative tagging of the displacements of the suspects allows the reader to feel that it is his ego function that has penetrated the social facade. The underlying fantasy will be elaborated in the next chapter of this paper.

THE DYNAMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUIET ENDING:

These various and thinly disguised defenses represent the obstacles

which Archer and through him the reader must surmount on his march to a clear understanding of reality, and the denoument. The endings, as noted, are rarely "shoot 'em up." Rather the culprit, confronted by Archer, accepts his fate. This is because the reader and Archer in the end, having mastered the situation, achieves a parental role, a superego position, relative to the other characters who are more or less guilty or petulant children. The final incarceration is not something either the reader or Archer is uncomfortable with, nor does it really seem unwelcome to the culprit. This is because the unconscious significance for the culprit is that of a small child being confined to its bedroom, welcome when the child is thus saved from the temptation of carrying out frightening aggressive wishes.

The force which punishes the child internally for its aggressive wishes corresponds to the super-ego, and it is this force which causes the child to accept the external restraint imposed by the child's parents. Archer in the end is acceptable to the villain because he embodies both a more kindly superego than the wrongdoer's introject mixed with the authority of a parental figure (analyst) who understands the wrongdoer's (patient's) dilemma. By the end of the novel Archer and the reader, through the use of ego function, have achieved mastery of their world, have become in fantasy the good parent.

MACDONALD'S TOPOGRAPHICAL METHOD:

There are psychological representations peculiar to Macdonald such as his use of geography:

> "This seems to be turning out to be an Arizona case. Didn't you say Richard Chantry came from there?"

> "Yes, he did. We all did. But we all ended up here in California."
> Her voice was flat, betraying no regret for the state she had left, nor any particular pleasure with the state she lived in now. She sounded like a disappointed woman. [70]

This pun on state may have some meaning. California is a metaphor for a style of life, a state in which these characters must live. Its psychological meaning is clearer with:

> "This lovely coast and its history have told me what they had to tell me, as Arizona once did.
> But as in Arizona the history is shallow and recent, and cannot support the major work that I was born to do. I must seek elsewhere for roots. [71]

History is a metaphor in MacDonald for super-ego, for introjects, for forces out of our past that live in our present and tell us how to live. That California history is shallow indicates to the reader that the characters who people these novels, particularly those who live in the "state" of California will tend to lack competent superego function. On the other hand the grip of the past, of other "states" than California, is not always beneficent.

> I said I took mine straight. The tea tasted like a clear dark dripping from the past. My grandmother came back with it, in crisp black funeral silks, and I looked out of the window to dispel her . . .
> "Nice view you have from here."
> "Yes, I bought it for the view. I shouldn't say I've bought it. It's mortgaged, after all." [72]

"I looed out the window to dispel her." The view -- which is the present "state" of California -- dispels the past. The archaic superego introjects are dispelled by the ego. But the view (ego) is mortgaged; we have the use of it but we do not have it free and clear. Debts to the superego are always being collected. You can't leave home.

These last devices, the use of time and place in a manner which

resonates with the reader's unconscious mental processes, are things that separates Ross MacDonald from less celebrated writers of detective fiction. Another is that even the city itself comes to be a representative of the mother's body, one through which Archer wanders driven by his compulsion to know and to make restitution.

> I lived for nights like these, moving across the city's great broken body, making connections among its millions of cells. I had a crazy wish or fantasy that some day before I died, if I made all the right neural connections, the city would come all the way alive. 73

The city, containing within its boundaries the people Archer seeks to know about, is likened to a body (the mother's) which in fantasy contains siblings and, formerly, ourselves -- the people we earliest desire intently to know about.

III

THE UNDERLYING FANTASY IN THE MODERN MYSTERY

It is now appropriate to try to answer the questions that Pederson-Krag raised about the mystery. To do this it is necessary to approach the problem more rigorously than has been done before. The reader will recall that the difficulty with the Pederson-Krag theory, aside from the hypothesizing of an unnecessary and unlikely actual primal scene, was that she was led to conclusions which were too general to be significant to the mystery story in particular. If it is true that sexual and intellectual curiousity share a common source in a universal primal scene fantasy (as many analytic writers have held), this nonetheless explains not only the reading of detective fiction but also most other literary and cultural pursuits. To answer the question of why we read in general is of course not to answer the question of why we read the mystery in particular. To approach such a question we must examine the mystery in particular. We have looked at several distinctive characteristics of the Ross MacDonald mystery in terms of their dynamic significance. In several cases, such as that of humor, this examination has led us straight to the underlying fantasy content in MacDonald's works. It is now time to focus on that underlying fantasy content.

Norman Holland* has pointed out that "a literary work means by reworking those rather unsavory wishful or fearful

*This section of this paper owes a great debt to Norman Holland's thinking on the subject of the dynamics of literary response.

fantasies at its heart into social, moral, or intellectual themes which are consciously satisfying to the ego and unconsciously safisfying to the deep wishes being acted out by the literary work."[74] What are the unsavory wishful or fearful fantasies at the heart of the modern mystery story?

Holland has pointed out that the fear of woman as engulfing is the most common fantasy in literature,[75] and the mystery story is no exception. The enduring impassive courage of the California detective, his weary but unbowed stance, stems from the adoption of a series of phallic attitudes as a progressive defense against an underlying wish for merger at the oral level. Chandler's famous dictum in his essay"The Simple Art of Murder", a statement which has defined for a generation the California detective hero, is best understood in this light.

> ...But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished or afraid...The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything...[76]

As Holland has pointed out in analyzing Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent, sinking into a moral swamp signifies, at the deepest level,"relaxing into a passive position toward a nurturing woman."[77] The California mystery clearly builds against that wish.

Surely most readers of the California mysteries have noticed the almost complete absence of heterosexual love*.

*With the exception of The Blue Hammer it is difficult to find even an affectionate heterosexual liaison in Ross MacDonald.

As women are felt as fundamentally threatening, homosexual aggression is offered as a defense.* And it is the sublimation of that aggression into honor that gives the California mystery some of its peculiar flavor. "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean. The detective is...the hero, he is everything. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world."[78]

On the anal level the detective novel is seen as embodying the fear and wish that a parental figure will overpower the detective and force him somehow. The defiance of the detective and his refusal to give in are hallmarks of an anal fantasy. The dirt--and its moral and political equivalents of corruption, dirty dealings, blackmail--provide the background against which the California detective novel is set. "Down these mean streets a man must go...who is not himself tarnished..." The child's pride is that he will not himself be soiled.

On the other hand, others will not be permitted to hold out on him. The theme of "getting something out of people,"[79] the reverse of an anal fear, is the detective's work. And "anal fantasies tend to stress laws and rules...which deal with collecting...Control, by oneself or by another, is an important theme."[80] Both Raymond

*in less interesting detective fiction by other writers male promiscuity may be offered instead.

Chandler's detective, Philip Marlowe, and Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer used to work for the official law enforcement agencies but quit after disagreements with their superiors. The fantasy is of collecting from others according to laws and rules, but of following these laws and rules at one's own pace and manner, without any enforced outside control. This, of course, reverses the childhood role of being collected from by"controlling others"in their manner and at their pace.

The strongly aggressive and assertive aspects of the plot of the California mystery, the quest for truth, is part of a phallic fantasy. "The single most common fantasy-structure in literature is phallic assertiveness balanced against oral engulfment."[81] This fantasy-structure is central to the detective story. The "poking and prying" into things that the detective does, as well as the bursts of action which punctuate the detective novel, are phallic defenses against a threat of oral fusion, of being made helpless and of being overwhelmed.[82]

Buxbaum's primal scene fantasy is represented, albeit somewhat sparingly, in the detective novel. There is little of the mysterious goings-on in the dead of night which one associates with such fantasies, but there are some incidents of that type, as when Marlowe is watching the house in which the photographer is shot in confusing circumstances in The Big Sleep. Also all incidents of spying on,

or "tailing" (of which there are remarkable few) are also probably part of a primal scene fantasy.

Since the detective has been termed the "Oedipal child" by so many writers on this subject, it is now appropriate to inquire about core oedipal fantasies in the California detective novel. How does one recognize an underlying oedipal fantasy? There are several ways of approaching this problem.

One might look for triangular relationships as opposed to dyadic ones. Or one might pay attention to the analytic aphorisms of Dr. Maxwell Gitelson: "Preeodipally, the people around a child are either good or bad, gratifying or nongratifying, positive or negative. Only in the oedipal situation do they become clearly differentiated into male and female with positives and negatives attached to both.[83]" Alternatively, one might consult Norman Holland on the subject: "It is safe to say, as a general rule, that a work of literature builds on an oedipal fantasy whenever... it makes us feel fairly realistic versions of adult love or hate.[84]" In general the characters in the detective novel are caricatures. They are either good or bad or sad or foolish or wistful or bitter; they are outgrowths of a pre-oedipal either-or world view. Relationships are not triangular; all the characters relate with the detective. Structurally he can be seen as the hub of the wheel with the "spokes" of his transactions radiating out to each character.

And we have already touched on the absence of real adult love and hate in these novels.

Another approach which we would suggest, and which might perhaps make the matter even more clear, is the use as a touchstone of the familiar Shakespeare phrase "I will not keep a corner in the thing I love for others' uses." We would suggest that whenever this phrase can be felt to be meaningful to the theme one is dealing with an underlying oedipal fantasy. When one thinks of Hamlet the phrase "I will not keep a corner in the thing I love for others' uses" seems appropriate to some aspect of Hamlet's dilemma. The same is true for Oedipus. Of course, the same is true for Othello. But the same is not true for the California detective story, nor indeed for any of the detective stories we have mentioned in this study. The question of whether or not "I will keep a corner in the thing I love for others' uses" does not arise. This is because the underlying fantasy material, as we have seen, is pre-oedipal. The oedipal material is defended against by denial. The reader is not made anxious by the oedipal fantasy because he his not exposed to it. However one should note that the reader is exposed to what Klein would call the reparative aspect of the absent oedipal anger (as well of the pre-oedipal rage). We refer to the rescue fantasy which is a determinant of the detective's role. "The child by rescuing his father proves his innocence

of any wish to kill him and at the same time by paying a life back, as it were, he owns his own life free and clear of any father."[85]

IV

APPLICATIONS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

If our dynamic model helps to explain the mystery, then it may also help to answer further questions about that genre. For example it seems intuitively likely that there is something more satisfying to many modern readers in the California mystery than can be found in Sherlock Holmes. If this is due to more than a difference in style -- if this is a difference in kind -- then perhaps our dynamic model of the detective novel can help us discern what in the California detective novel is perceived as more satisfying from a dynamic point of view.

There is an important clue, as it were, in the description of Sherlock Holmes by the literary critic, Gavin Lambert:

> . . . It returns to myth, echoed in the magic possibilities in trained perception of the visible world suggested by Conan Doyle. 86

'The magic possibilities in trained perception' is an apt phrase. It suggests, quite correctly, the underlying fantasy content, the magical thinking of the omnipotent child. The predominance of tactile and visual "clues" in the Holmes stories may testify to the preverbal developmental phase of the underlying fantasy. The guise of "reason" in Holmes is, as Lambert senses, in fact a rationalization of magical thinking. Some of the things Freud says about the uncanny are true of Conan Doyle's productions. "The situation is altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality . . . he deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility. We react to his inventions as we should have reacted to real experiences . . . but it must be added that his success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction . . .[87]" Freud does not actually explain

what this dissatisfaction is, but we would speculate that the relative lack of satisfaction with the Holmes' stories results in some part from the use of a more regressive defense (magical thinking) against the pre-oedipal fantasy material discussed in the preceding section.

The relative importance of the ending, of the "solving" of a "puzzle" in Holmes type mysteries, may similarly stem from the relatively greater need to rationalize the magical thinking of the main character with a retrospective facade of logic.

If the underlying fantasy content and the defenses against it do not feature "magical thinking" and if for that reason, and for others that have been discussed earlier, the ending is not the central focus of the California mystery, yet the ending does still have some importance in its own right. A good California mystery may to some extent be one the reader would read if the ending were not there, as Raymond Chandler claimed; but on the whole one suspects the ending does have some dynamic function. Considering the amount of orality we have found associated with the detective novel, it is perhaps not surprising that the ending should have some oral determinant. "Suspense, too, has an oral quality . . . (it) creates a problem in us and what amounts to a hunger for its resolution . . ."[88] Of course endings have multiple functions.

Endings in detective stories, as in stories in general, have a function which can be understood in terms of Freud's model of jokes: the promise that there will be an "intellectual meaning, a point, enables us to relax and enjoy a playing with words and ideas"[89] that we would otherwise dismiss. Another way of saying this is that "meaning, or even the promise of meaning, is a sop thrown to

the superego[90]", the which enables us more comfortably the participate in the unconscious fantasy content. This is why Antonioni's movie Blow-Up was so controversial and so disturbing to audiences. The movie is essentially the first half of a detective story. But, instead of proceeding to an "ending," the record of the crime and all the suspects vanish from the life of the main character leaving him without any problem, and the movie abrupty ends. Viewers who were comfortable with the fantasy material, and who would have remained comfortable within the accepted framework of a final superimposition of meaning, became uncomfortable at the moment the movie ended. This was not because of the material in the movie itself; people were not anxious until the film had already stopped. It was the failure to retrospectively impose an intellectual order on the unconscious fantasy material that made viewers anxious.

In concluding this paper we will address a question which has been touched on by many writers concerned with analytic interpretation of the mystery story. This question is the relationship between classic literature, in particular the myth of Oedipus, and the detective story. Charles Rycroft has held with the majority of writers on the subject that Oedipus is the ideal detective story:

> In the ideal detective story the detective or hero would discover that he himself is the criminal for whom he has been seeking. Such a story, though it is not generally accounted to a detective story, does in fact exist and has given its name to the very psychological constellation which endows observations and fantasies of the primal scene with such significance. I am referring, of course, to the myth of Oedipus . . . 91

Those who find Oedipus the "paradigm" of the detective story tend

to hold that Hamlet and Crime and Punishment are also great detective stories. We propose to examine this conclusion briefly using the analytic framework of the mystery which has been postulated in this paper.

First we propose to examine a section of a Ross MacDonald mystery which is clearly reminiscent of the Oedipus myth in some ways. Then we propose to analyze the difference between this modern story and the ancient one.

> . . . The paint gun hissed in his hands.
> A blue cloud stung my eyes. Then I felt the sap's soft explosion against the back of my head. I glissaded down blue slopes of pain to a hole which opened for me.
> Later there was talking.
> "Better wash out his eyes," the first gravedigger said, "we don't want to blind him."
> "Let him go blind," the second gravedigger said. "Teach him a lesson . . .
> The fear of blindness is the worst fear there is. It crawled on my face and entered my mouth. I wnated to beg them to save my eyes. A persistent bright speck behind my eyes stared me down and shamed me into continued silence. 92

The fear of blindness is usually a substitute for the fear of castration[93], but the "bright speck", what is that? "A persistent bright speck behind my eyes stared me down and shamed me into continued silence." The "bright speck" is some code which urges the detective not to give in. But as we have seen this is the obstinancy and withholding characteristic of the anal fantasy.

On the following pages Archer comes back to consciousness, his vision intact. A Tommy Lemberg is covering him with a gun. Tommy says to Archer that Mr. Schwartz, a mobster, is waiting to see him.

> "There's a bathroom down the hall. Think you can walk?"
> "I can walk."
> But I had to lean on the wall to reach the bathroom. 74

We see here that it is true that villains can represent the parent, and that the quest for knowledge and autonomy in later life as depicted in the mystery can reflect in some sense the child's struggle for independence and autonomy as Archer, regressed under strain, makes a point of asserting that he can walk by himself.

But autonomy is not easily come by. "But I had to lean against the wall to reach the bathroom." The reader here has a chance to defy the authority figures of his youth.

> . . . one of my front teeth was broken off short. My nose resembled a boiled potato.
> All of this made me angry. I moved on Tommy. He stepped back into the doorway. I lost my footing and fell to my knees, took the barrel of his gun in the nape of my neck . . . 95

The symbolism of the loss of the tooth and of the gun barrel are clear. The quest for knowledge, the figurative invasion of the mother's body to discover, to chart, to count -- to catch and to condemn -- has brought a punishment which at least masquerades as Oedipal. Where classic literature differs from detective literature is here, because this is where classical literature ends. Oedipus has <u>actually</u> entered his mother's body, having previously eliminated his father. Oedipus dares to achieve knowledge of the mother's body, dares to defy the triangular oedipal threat. For this he is punished in the classic manner, a castration equivalent, as he blinds himself, after having first trapped and condemned himself by his own edict.

Archer also enters the mother's body, that is to say seeks to

know more than it is safe to know. He too is punished with a castration equivalent. His sight is taken from him, his tooth is broken. Following this, however, there is the obvious divergence between the two forms of literature. Archer recovers his sight, pieces together his puzzle, achieves knowledge, and ends up high and dry, free and clear -- beyond any threat of retribution. The "castrators" are dead or nullified.

Meanwhile, Oedipus is permanently marred, a terrible victim, overcome by the Oedipal menace.

Now is this difference, aside from the differences in language, wholly structural? Is it simply that the author reaches a cross-roads and can then choose to move either uphill, as it were, to tragedy or downhill to detective fiction? Can an author simply say to himself "Hmm, shall I let the main character win today, or shall I let him lose?" and thus decide whether the fiction will turn out as tragedy or detective. Or is there some other psychological difference between the two types of stories which has so far escaped definition and which has the application of analytic thinking might reveal to us?

We feel the latter to be the case. That there is some psychological difference between tragedy and detective fiction aside from outcome, can first of all be shown by example. For there are writers, and we refer specifically to James Hadley Chase and James M. Cain, who have written novels which begin like detective stories, but in which, about twenty pages from the ending, the reader starts to realize that, while the main character has gotten himself into the usual mess with police, bad guys, and beautiful women he does seem to be having more than the usual difficulty extricating himself again. And at the end the reader

is surprised to find that -- lo and behold! -- the main character is in fact trapped and is not going to escape.

These stories have a peculiar interest to them when first encountered, but are not particularly popular or pleasurable. Nor do they move us, like tragedy.

The reason for this can be found in the psychological differences between the mystery story and tragedy, one of which is simply this: in the detective story the obstacles to knowledge are external to the detective; in tragedy the obstacles are internal, are introjected superego prohibitions. Freud's analysis of the character type that succeeds and then cannot stand success is surprisingly close to the type of the tragic hero. The tragic hero always achieves success early on, but then because of superego prohibitions not consciously understood by him (or her; see Freud on Lady Macbeth) sets in motion his own downfall.

The detective and the reader share a "bright spot", an ego ideal which not only permits them to succeed but demands that they do so. The detective is blinded by others; outsiders try to "castrate" him. Because they are outside he can overcome them. Oedipus is attacked by something within himself; and in the ensuing struggle he must lose one way or another.

The reader-cum-detective, motivated by his quest for knowledge, is able to overcome the externalized apparently Oedipal threat. This externalization explains the mystery's appeal. The mystery is a story of the externalized apparently Oedipal menace overcome as obstacles to a fantasy search for knowledge about matters of life and death. But we saw earlier that the "bright spot" is an anal fantasy

of refusal to give in, of refusal to be coerced.

We say apparently-Oedipal because, as we have shown in the last chapter, there is no true Oedipal threat in the detective story. On the deepest fantasy level we continue to participate in oral, anal, and phallic material. The trappings of myth-castration symbols are borrowed to provide a more exciting, grand, and acceptable pre-conscious fantasy for the reader. Detective literature "means" by reworking unsavory fantasies (pre-oedipal) in themes that are consciously satisfying (honor, determination, and insight master an external threat).

"Oedipal" symbols can be used freely by the author without causing anxiety in the reader because there still is no triangular relationship, no real love and hate, no question of a corner in the thing one loves for other's uses.

The appearance of oedipal threat is "split off" from the underlying material. That frightening material is denied. What remains - the apparent-oedipal: (broken tooth, blindness)-is on the fantasy level forcing, coercion, and threatened loss of autonomy. These pre-oedipal threats, though dressed up in oedipal imagery, are just pre-oedipal threats. The oral, anal, and phallic fantasies elaborated in the last chapter ward off these threats.

That the anxiety and catharsis of oedipal literature are not found in detective fiction should now not surprise us. The underlying fantasy is not oedipal. The fact that even knowledgeable readers may find it much easier to become involved in a mystery than in, say, Hamlet, may be explained in this way. The absence of true oedipal material in some way makes the reading of detective both less pleasurable and less painful than the reading of "serious" fiction.

Whoever invented the phrase "juvenile fiction" to refer to literary adventures of this sort happened upon an important connection. For we see it is true that the fantasy content of "juvenile fiction" does indeed come from an earlier period of life than that of what we sometimes call "sophisticated" or "adult" literature.

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